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1. CATCH-22 IN KABUL

State Dept. review completed

Afghan Defense Minister Abdul Qader has just concluded an official visit to Moscow where he presumably reviewed the military situation. Growing mujahidin strength and a continuing decline in the size of the Afghan forces argue for Moscow to increase its own military assistance. The most serious problem confronting Moscow, however, may be disillusionment and disloyalty within the Babrak regime. A larger Soviet military presence and role would only intensify these problems.

The latest Afghan Ministry of Defense report available to us on the battle for control of the countryside shows that, in spite of intensive Soviet offensives last spring and summer, the mujahidin now have total control over ten more districts (192 out of a total of 292) than they did at the beginning of 1982. The regime now controls only 72 (25 percent) of the districts and in another 36 districts controls no more than the main town.

The Soviets are known to be concerned about increasing mujahidin strength in Kabul and other cities and about the guerrillas' growing use of SA-7 missiles. This winter, mujahidin activity has been at least partially responsible for an acute shortage of POL supplies which has hampered military operations. The POL shortage reportedly caused the Afghan air force to be grounded in late January. The guerrillas have also cut off the electricity supply in Kabul for most of the past six weeks.

Meanwhile, the Babrak regime appears to be crumbling from the inside. Rifts within the ruling party are intensifying. Khalqis are reportedly being removed from active duty in military intelligence because of suspected collusion with the resistance. The Khalqis, in turn, are capitalizing on a major scandal in the money market involving Soviet advisers and high-level Parchamis to brand those implicated as traitors. New divisions within the dominant Parcham faction have appeared as disillusionment with Babrak and the Soviets grows.

In the military forces, political disaffection is leading to further instances of mutiny and defection. The early January mutiny by 300 soldiers of the 25th division at Khost was followed later in the month by a general rebellion of the division's officers. They then joined mujahidin in an attack which cost the division substantial losses. In mid-January, inside help enabled mujahidin attacking an Afghan commando regiment base near Kabul to destroy barracks and six weapons depots. The regime has been forced to use increasingly extreme measures to replenish its depleted forces with new recruits, indicating that the available reserve is dwindling.

Moscow previously appeared willing to live with a military stand-off to give political policies time to work. The dilemma facing Soviet strategists now is that political decay in Kabul is spreading and may upset the military stalemate.

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